

Atlantic Monographs

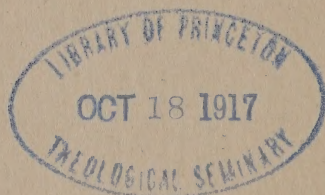
The Assault on Humanism

By Paul Shorey



Atlantic Monthly Company
Boston

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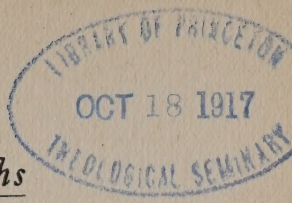


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The Assault on Humanism



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PREFACE

In the common lot of physical mortality, Nature has discriminated against the magazine. Less ephemeral in essential things than the newspaper, it follows the daily journal close in the race for oblivion. Like other living creatures, however, the magazine adapts itself instinctively to the circumstances of its being, and lives its time, taking on the vivid colors of the world about it, careless how soon they fade after the last fatal days of the month have heralded the birth of a successor. But it is *The Atlantic's* happy experience to enjoy, now and again, a kind of posthumous satisfaction in a continuing public interest in contributions which, thanks to the spirit of the times, or to the genius of an author, are read, reread, and saved with painful care. To these occasional and unusual contributions, *The Atlantic* has determined to offer a less precarious immortality by publishing them now and again in editions of its own, selecting a form we consider appropriate,

P r e f a c e

and a price our friends may not frown upon. No fitter beginning of this proposed series could be made than with the republication of these sharp and glittering essays of Professor Shorey's, written in defense of things he holds most precious. If not another blow be struck for the classics in our lifetime, historians will yet maintain that a good fight has been fought, and one well worthy of the luminous chronicles which adorn the pages of humanism.

E. S.

*Atlantic Monthly Office,
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The Assault on Humanism

I

NOT to us first have the things of beauty seemed fair, the sore-tried humanist murmurs after Theocritus. But Tennyson's adaptation is more pertinent to the present purpose:—

Not only we, the latest seed of time,
New men that in the flying of a wheel
Cry down the past,—

not only we blaspheme the divinity that
we lack eyes to discern.

Es wird nichts so schön gemacht
Es kommt einer der's veracht!

There were brave men living before Agamemnon, and educational reformers who had the courage of their insensibilities before Mr. Flexner. He stands in the momentary limelight, the transient American embodiment of a recurrent type, exhibiting as the first pledges of a

new science of education the iconoclasms of Tom Paine's *Age of Reason*, and the arguments against Latin of the chapter on Education in the fourth Discourse of Helvetius's *De l'Esprit*.

Education—what it is, in contrast to what it might be—has always seemed to impatient revolutionaries a no less unsatisfactory and bungling makeshift than marriage, government, the distribution of property, or life itself. And the emphasis of his irresponsible denunciation has often convinced naïve disciples that the protestant is divinely commissioned to administer a new school system for the creation of a new heaven and a new earth.

An excellent subject for a monograph of the pedagogical seminar would be a comparative historical study of the psychology of the projectors and enthusiasts, the expositors of Great Didactics, and exploiters of Gertrudes teaching their children, and institutors of Senhusian schools who have proclaimed this gospel

of educational 'reformation without tarrying for any.'

A specialist in the psychology of advertising would be needed to appreciate the unconscious policy that attracts attention by paradoxes and exaggerations which are compromised and attenuated in practice when the object has been attained. The philosopher of history would then remind the disdainful humanist that these crudities are inseparable from the wasteful process of human evolution, and that the final outcome of agitation is sometimes a good unforeseen by the agitator. And the conclusion of the whole matter would be that sage return of Plato upon himself: 'Ah, dear Glaucon, do not affirm that the curriculum which we have prescribed for our guardians is the best possible education. But only that they must have the best, whatever it is, if they are to have the chief thing needful.'

To return to Mr. Flexner—the bookish student of recent modernist manifestoes

experiences that odd sense of 'been there before' so entertainingly discussed by the Autocrat and attributed by the new psychology to some weakness or defect of 'stoic tension' in the brain. 'If this lad comes to my school,' says the Platonic sophist in effect, 'I will not afflict the spirit of youth in him and corrupt his intelligence with useless studies as other educators do, but teach him the art of life and how to rule his house and the city.'—'For this reason,' said the Arbiter of Elegancies, Petronius, 'do our boys become so stupid in the schools, because they learn nothing that pertains to real life.'—'There's Aristotle,' cries Sir John Daw in *The Silent Woman*, 'a mere commonplace fellow; Plato a discourser; Thucydides and Livy tedious and dry.'—'What do you think of the poets, Sir John?' inquires Clerimont.—'Not worthy to be named for authors. Homer, an old tedious prolix ass, talks of curriers and chines of beef; Virgil, of dunging of land

and bees; Horace, of I know not what.'—
'I think so,' is Clerimont's comment.

Campanella's *City of the Sun* anticipates, so far as the undeveloped science of his day allowed, moving-picture education and the California millionaire who proposes to teach real geography on a playground-landscape garden map of the world on Mercator's Projection, costing what only a millionaire could afford. All studies and sciences are painted on the circuit walls of Campanella's Utopia in an admirable manner. The boys move, not the pictures. 'Before the third year the boys learn the language and the alphabet on the wall by walking around them. . . . There are magistrates who announce the meaning of the pictures, and boys are accustomed to learn all the sciences without toil and as if for pleasure . . . until they are ten years old.'

It would please President Eliot to hear that 'In order to find out the bent of the genius of each one, after the seventh

year they take them to the readings of all the sciences. There are four lectures . . . and in the course of four hours the four in their order explain everything.'

The result, as was to be expected, is that 'The sciences are taught with a facility . . . by which more scholars are turned out by us in one year than by you in ten or fifteen years.' This is because 'Not too much care is given to the cultivation of languages . . . for such knowledge requires much servile labor and memory work, so that a man is rendered unskillful since he has contemplated nothing but the words of books.'

In the classic age of Louis XIV the *salon* philosopher, Antoine de Lamotte, undertook to shake off the yoke of opinion and authority and 'evaluate' anew all traditional literature and time-honored studies. He achieved a success of scandal by rewriting Homer as Homer ought to have written. He also sustained the theses that dead languages cannot form

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the living mind, that modern literature is superior to the literature of Greece and Rome, and that translations are 'equally as good' as the originals.

Some hundred years later Rousseau thinks that the world will be surprised to learn that 'I count the study of languages among the inutilities of education'; and Turgot denounces the pedantry and the tyranny of the schoolroom in terms strangely familiar to recent readers of the *Atlantic Monthly* and the *New Republic*. 'They begin by . . . stuffing into the heads of children a crowd of the most abstract ideas. Those whom nature in her variety summons to her by all her objects, we fasten up in single spots, we occupy them on words which cannot convey any sense to them.'

This is not Mr. Flexner complaining that the 'preparatory school . . . uses words . . . not primarily to transmit a meaning'; or that 'children with a turn for the woods' are chained in the dungeons

of discipline; it is not Professor O'Shea establishing the foundations of 'dynamic education' on the scientific principle that 'the mind grows but slowly and imperfectly' in 'a seat fastened to the floor'; it is not the Pindaric audacity of Mr. Wells's lament that his school offered no key to the vortex of gigantic forces about him in London; it is not Mr. Randolph Bourne explaining how the Wirt plan aims at nothing less distractingly comprehensive than that 'the child should have every day, in some form or other, contact with all the different activities which influence a well-rounded human being'; it is not Miss Rebecca West denouncing the failure of middle-aged maiden-lady tutors to kindle the fire that in her heart resides, and hissing with Blanche Amory, '*il me faut des émotions.*' It is a philosopher of that eighteenth century to which we owe that reactionary document, the Constitution of the United States.

Nor is there anything new to be said

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in serious or satirical comment on these pronouncements. '*Pertinax res barbaries est fateor*,' says old Simon Grynaeus in the preface to the Lyons Plato of 1548. Pope's distich is still a sufficient reply to the unreal conventional *cliché* that the study of good literature in the classroom only engenders a lifelong distaste for it:—

Or damn all Shakespeare like the affected fool
At court, who hates whate'er he read at school.

The unprejudiced invalidation of time-honored subjects of study was undertaken two centuries in advance of the modernist school by the tutor and family council of Voltaire's Marquis. It was decided, to begin with, that the young Marquis should not waste his time in becoming acquainted with Cicero, Horace, and Virgil. 'I wish my son to be a wit,' said his mother, 'that he may make a figure in the world.' And if he learns Latin he is inevitably lost. Are comedies or operas played in Latin? But what

was he to learn? 'The minds of children are overwhelmed with a mass of useless knowledge. . . . At length, after reviewing the merits and demerits of every science, it was decided that the young Marquis should learn to dance.' There is as much soul in the singing and drill at Hampton as in the Latin grammar of the preparatory school.

These anticipations of Mr. Flexner's ideas are no disproof of their validity. I merely wish to contemplate his magnified contemporaneity, if not *sub specie æternitatis*, where all finite notabilities dwindle, at least in that larger historical perspective which he disdains but which brings me consolation.

If argument were identical with what a former editor of the *Atlantic* called the 'readable proposition,' my task would be much simplified. I should without further preface or apology assail in mood and figure the logic of Mr. Flexner and President Eliot, and enter a demurrer which

would dispense me from all substantive pleading.

I do not refer primarily to those lamentable irrelevancies with which President Eliot expands the little that he has to say on the main theme. The horrible obsession of the world-war is the King Charles's Head of nearly all contemporaneous disquisition. To President Eliot the lesson of the war is the confirmation of Herbert Spencer's philosophy of education: it shows that 'science is the knowledge best worth having'—for the manufacture of high explosives and the construction of Zeppelins and submarines? No. 'To make possible the secure civilization based on justice, the *sanctity of contracts* [italics mine] and good-will.' This may pair off with Mr. Cosmo Hamilton's prophecy in *Harper's Weekly*, that after the war the European nations will abolish Greek and Latin, 'and appoint a big kindly man as professor of morals to go in and out among the boys.'

Similarly it would appear that there is no effective body of educated opinion that makes a man of Mr. Flexner's prominence shrink from arguing that the very conception of mental discipline is annulled by the existence of clever boys who find 'hard' studies comparatively easy; or that the acceptance by some colleges of preparatory Latin as an indispensable minimum is a virtual admission that Latin is not needed at all for a college education.

But these irrelevant *obiter dicta* are not of serious import to the main argument; and my demurrer to the logic relates rather to methods which Mr. Flexner and President Eliot have in common with each other and with many assailants of classical studies—the shifting of the issue from one kind or grade of education to another; the fallacy of assigning one cause for infinitely complex phenomena; the postulate of an 'absolute either—or' where no such alternative confronts us;

the statement of the opponent's case in its feeblest form; exploiting the equivocation of 'utility,' 'practical,' 'discipline,' 'science,' 'culture,' and other ambiguous terms; the substitution of prophecy, or unsubstantiated assertion, for fact.

These procedures may pass muster in the smooth course of 'the readable proposition'; they could not endure the test of an old-fashioned disputation.

That liberal, progressive, scientific thinker and cautious speaker, John Stuart Mill, says, with discriminating precision, that 'The greater classics are compositions which from the altered conditions of human life are likely to be seldom paralleled in their sustained excellence by the times to come.' The intrinsic worth of classic literature is not the theme of this paper, and I shall not attempt to confirm Mill's dictum by elaborate argument. But if it happened to be true, it would be a fact for a rational philosophy of education to take into the account.

Our need for the study of Latin cannot be deduced from the eternal order of nature, like physics and chemistry. It is not even coextensive with our globe, like geology. I should not advise a Chinese or Japanese boy to study Latin. He needs all his linguistic memory for other purposes. Some trenchant rhetoric of Macaulay often misquoted in this debate was designed only to enforce the contention that for the education of young Hindoos, English is on the whole the most available alien language and literature.

It is quite true that with the lengthening of the interval that divides us from the renaissance and from Rome, the *relative* significance of Latin for us tends to diminish. The time may come when Latin will concern us as little as it does the Chinese, not to speak of the Martians. I do not think it is coming in the next fifty years. About 1770, advanced thinkers exulted in the belief that their arguments had banished the classical

superstition forever. In fact, they were on the eve of a great revival of Hellenism. It would have amazed Kant to be told that within fifty years—that is, in 1820—Greek would be a leading study in all the Gymnasias of Germany. As my old teacher James Russell Lowell used to say, I have seen too many spirits of the age to be afraid of this one.

Meanwhile, the broad reasons why your boy should certainly study Latin if he is going to college, and probably if he is going to complete a high-school course, are not difficult to discover. It is because he inherits largely by way of France and England the institutional and literary tradition of Greco-Roman civilization, and because he speaks a language whose higher vocabulary is almost wholly Latin and which was broken in and fashioned to literary uses and the expression of abstract ideas by men who not only read but wrote Latin. 'You no sooner begin to philosophize

things,' says Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, 'than you must go to the Mediterranean languages.'

This, with some qualifications and reserves, is in a lesser degree true also of German. French is, as a majority of the leading French critics have argued in this controversy, essentially a form of Latin. But there is a peculiar necessity that an educated English speaker should know at least enough Latin to give him some conception of its relation to English. Our philosophical German friends and critics tell us that English lacks the beautiful organic unity and purity of German, and that the general inferiority of our intelligence is in part due to the fact that the vocabulary for the expression of ideas is not with us, as in German, a natural upgrowth from the roots of sensation and perception, but is grafted onto the language from an alien stock. The structure and the psychology of compound and abstract words is

not transparent and intelligible as it is in German. *Undurchdringlichkeit*—to take the classic illustration—is a far more full-bodied abstracter of the quintessence of No Thoroughfare or *Durchgang Verboten*, than ‘impenetrability,’ ‘impermeableness,’ or ‘imperviability’ ever could become. And *Rücksichtslosigkeit*, as Mr. Houston Stewart Chamberlain would copiously expound, possesses a flavor and a tang which ‘inconsiderateness,’ or ‘regardlessness,’ or ‘unscrupulousness’ cannot reproduce.

And hence we imperfect English speakers only half understand what we are talking about. There is a horribly ingenious plausibility in this, as in so much philosophical German ratiocination. But there is an element of truth which we may take to heart. Our literary critics have very properly replied that English is in some sort a not inharmonious juxtaposition or fusion of two languages. It is, in respect of its substantive vocabulary, a far more complicated instrument

and organ of thought than either German or French. And for this very reason it yields to those who know all its stops effects with which even Greek can hardly vie. Well, most of us are not directly concerned with the final mastery of English for these highest artistic and philosophical ends. But the education of our guiding classes must recognize that, without some clue to this double structure, the normal English speaker will certainly have less intelligence, and probably less practical mastery of his native idiom, than the Frenchman or the German. He will be more exposed to the mental confusion of dimly discerned meanings and imperfectly apprehended relations. The moral is plain.

In defiance of Mr. Flexner's unwarranted admonition that we must rest our case on one argument only, we may supplement this fundamental and elementary consideration by others hardly less so. Some training in the compara-

tive grammar of a synthetic and an analytic language, is an almost indispensable form of mental discipline for the speakers of such a language as ours. And Latin, for *a priori* reasons approved by esteemed psychologists, by virtue of its historic relationships, and also on the evidence of a wide experience, is the best available language for the purpose. What the new pedagogy calls 'content value' is added by the further consideration that the chief Latin classics—Cicero, Virgil, Livy, Horace—in their lucid rationality and precision, their urbanity, their sanity, their common sense, their humanized and humanizing emancipation from 'primitive foolishness,' parochialism and fanaticism, are singularly well adapted for the initiation of the youthful mind into literature, criticism of life, and the historic sense; and that they have in fact been so used to such an extent that the literature of Europe prior to the year 1900 is unintelligible without them. 'And

if in Arkansas or Texas I should meet a man reading Horace, I were no stranger,' notes Emerson in the ninth volume of his Journal.

Lastly, without some preparation in Latin the youth who goes on to college cannot study critically linguistics, philosophy, history, or any Romance language, or any European literature, or anything, in short, except physical science, in which he probably does not wish to specialize, and '*Science mousseuse*,' which, without critical equipment, will only addle his brains. 'I was thinking,' said Brother Copas to the wild little American, 'That I might start teaching you Latin—it's the only way to find out all that St. Hospital means, including all that it has meant for hundreds of years.'

II

I expect to develop these obvious but indispensable topics in a separate paper. There is no reason why I should interrupt the present argument with this detail. The work has been done. This is not a new question to be debated *in vacuo*.

Indeed, my chief complaint against the assailants of Latin is their inacquaintance with, or their deliberate suppression of, the considerable literature in which these suggestions are worked out with discriminating specific arguments and concrete illustrations. Some years ago I debated a similar question with President Eliot at the meeting of the Association of American Universities. He paid no attention to my paper at the time, and he now writes in the *Atlantic* in total disregard of the entire literature of the subject. I do not mean merely that he suppresses the bibliography and the

mention of names: I mean that he neglects distinctions that have been pertinently drawn, ignores challenges that have been presented again and again, and reiterates without qualification fallacies that have repeatedly been exploded. In this President Eliot conforms to the general practice or policy of opponents of Latin and writers on pedagogy. They either have not read the literature which they controvert, or they intentionally ignore it. They do not inform their readers of its existence, and they do not even tacitly amend their own arguments to meet its specific contentions. In controversy this is what Lincoln called 'bushwhacking.' In the authors of textbooks of the science or the history of education it is the abandonment of the scientific for the frankly partisan attitude.

The third volume of Professor Graves's *History of Education* emphasizes throughout Herbert Spencer's well-known essay and quotes considerable passages from it

and from Huxley. It does not mention any of the replies to these arguments. There is no reference to John Stuart Mill's inaugural address, to Matthew Arnold's lectures in America, to Jebb, Gildersleeve, and the long line of writers who have riddled the arguments of Spencer, and have pointed out the very special conditions that determined Huxley's attitude and that limit the application of his satire. There is no hint of the fact that among the advocates of classical studies have been nearly all the great critics of the nineteenth century, from Goethe, Coleridge and Sainte-Beuve to Brunetière, Anatole France, Lemaître, Faguet, Doumic, Lowell, and Arnold. And that these writers have given definite reasons for their faith.

Professor Graves's book is only a typical and rather moderate example of the prevailing practice of modernists and professors of pedagogy—in their books, as I know; in their classrooms, as I am

informed. They not only argue as partisans against the Classics but they systematically suppress both the arguments and the bibliography of the case for the Classics. Mr. Flexner, for example, takes for granted, as needing no qualification by distinctions, that catchword of the new pedagogy in every age—the crude absolute antithesis between the study of words and the study of things. ‘Things,’ says Plato in an abbreviated but fair summary, ‘fall into two classes. Some things have sensible likenesses easy to apprehend. These you can point out and so teach them readily without trouble and the use of language. But the greatest and most precious things have no outward image of themselves visible to man, to which the teacher can lightly point and so satisfy the soul of the inquirer. Therefore we must train and discipline our minds to render and receive an account of them in words. For it can be done in no other way.’

Plato is a primitive thinker suspect of mystical realism, and that authority will not impress Mr. Flexner. Let him then weigh and answer what (to select a few names at random) Coleridge, Ruskin, Mill, Lloyd-Morgan, Croce, and Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch have said about this precious opposition between words and things. We shall then cheerfully continue the discussion. Till then we are absolved.

Similarly, Mr. Flexner dismisses the service of Latin studies to English style with the cavalier averment, 'No evidence has ever been offered.' But quite apart from the many detailed and discriminating discussions of the question in the literature of Apology for the Classics, there is the consentient present-day testimony of many of the leading professors of English and modern languages, as provisionally presented with particularizing argument and illustration in the pamphlets of Professors Gayley, Sherman, Grandgent,

Lane Cooper, and in the lectures on the art of writing by the King Edward VII Professor of English Literature at Cambridge. We do not ask Mr. Flexner to submit his judgment to these authorities, or to their reasons, if he can answer them. It is the method of debate that ignores them (the arguments not the names) to which we demur. The subject is still open for any fresh considerations which Mr. Flexner has to present. But his dictum that no evidence has been ever offered is not argument, but a petulant ebullition of feeling.

It follows that, in the present state of the question, the principal effort of the classicist who aims at argument rather than eloquence must be to shame his opponents from their unfair tactics, their neglect of the evidence, their preposterous logic, and to urge the educated public to examine the matter for themselves. He must wearily repeat his old list of 'must nots' and 'don'ts.' You must not shift

the issue by talking about democracy and the masses, and industrial education, and Booker Washington at Tuskegee, and Madame Montessori. That is a mere subterfuge. We are speaking of non-vocational high-school and collegiate education. You must not urge that 'they don't get Latin,' that Latin is badly taught and imperfectly remembered, unless you can show that other subjects are always effectively taught and not forgotten. And also, unless you confess that the unrest and the unsettlement which you yourselves have introduced into American education is a chief cause of the lack of conviction with which most definite or difficult subjects are taught and studied to-day.

You must not talk as most of you do about eight, ten, or twelve years of Latin study without result, for that is an unscrupulous exaggeration. You must not misquote and apply to totally different conditions the satire of English writers

aimed at schools in which practically nothing was taught except the writing of Latin verse.

You must not argue that, because Latin is comparatively less important to us than it was to the Renaissance, it is therefore of little or no significance. For, if you have ever studied elementary logic, you know the name for that kind of reasoning. You must not regard a demagogic sneer at culture as an argument, for culture is a harmless necessary word that serves as well as another to designate if not to describe a persistent though not easily definable ideal—the thing, let us say, that a Latinless generation of graduates will presumably lack.

You must not say, as President Eliot again repeats, that modern literature is not inferior to the Classics. That is a consolation for those who cannot have both. But our contention is precisely that the boy who goes to college or even through the high school will understand modern

literature better for knowing even a little Latin. There is no real incompatibility between knowing Latin and acquaintance with modern literature. The professors of Classics would cheerfully stand a competitive examination on modern literature with the professional modernists at any time.

You must not argue that Latin is useless, without discriminating the various meanings of utility, the higher and lower utility, the immediate and remote utility, direct and indirect—and unless you are prepared also to abolish for high school and college students all studies that are useless in the precise sense in which the term applies to Latin. You must not tell the public that the science of psychology has disproved mental discipline in general, or the specific value of the discipline of analytic language study in particular. For if you are a competent psychologist you know that it is false. And to sum up and conclude these nega-

tive commandments, you ought not to divert the minds of your pupils, your readers, your audiences, from the real issue, by rhetorical appeals either to prejudice or to pseudo-science.

By the appeal to prejudice I mean such things as the perpetual insinuation that classical studies are aristocratic, undemocratic, supercilious, arrogant, narrowly exclusive, and unappreciative of modern excellence. Democracy has nothing to do with the matter; and it is a shameless fallacy to introduce the word into the discussion at all. There is no connection between the equality of men before the law and the attempt to equalize the educational value of all subjects for all purposes. Any kind of knowledge may puff up some kinds of men, and to triumph over your neighbor because he happens not to know the things you know best, is not an amiable trait of human nature. The perpetual defensive against unfair attack may lend a touch of acerbity to

the speech of some advocates of the Classics. But classical teachers of today, as a whole, are, as they have to be, a rather meek and meeching set.

The successful practical man hires his chemists and physicists as he may hire a classical tutor for his son or for his university; and he is not in the least prejudiced against the study of chemistry and physics by the suspicion that the associate professor of chemistry, who has a salary of twenty-five hundred dollars a year, secretly regards him as an ignoramus.

III

Some humanistic readers may be disappointed by the space given to these dialectics of controversy. But it is no longer worth while to play this game according to the conventional rules. What is expected in a plea for classical studies is gentle deprecation of the utilitarian and commercial spirit of the age, and wistful emotional appeals to an idealism that soars beyond all practical reference to actual educational conditions and all narrow scrutiny of the adversary's logic. There is thus no meeting of minds. The rhetoric of idealism makes no impression on advocates who have prejudged the case which they refuse to study. And the general reader, even if pleasantly and irresponsibly titillated for the moment, turns away in the mood of Tennyson's Northern Farmer after the sermon,—

'An' I thowt a said whot a owt to a said, an I coom'd
awaäy.'

I do not know whether Mr. Leacock intended seriously his skit on 'Homer and Humbug,' and the stone which he wished to hurl into the academic garden wrapped in the rune, 'Homer and the Classics are just primitive literature.' But to the Spencers and the Le Bons who take it seriously, we could only reply,—

Deafer . . . blinder unto holy things,
Hope not to make thyself by idle vows,
Being too blind to have desire to see.

If we are to count opinions, Professor Leacock's opinion that the art of Homer belongs 'in the same class as primitive music and . . . primitive medicine' will count as one. And so will the opinion of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch that 'Homer stands first, if not unmatched, among poets in the technical triumph over the capital disability of annihilating flat passages.' And Professor Leacock's emotion of conviction is more than matched by that of this successful writer of twentieth-century novels and Professor of English

Literature at Cambridge, who declares that if the university should limit him to three texts on which to preach English Literature, he would choose the Bible, Shakespeare, and Homer—and Homer first. There is ample choice in opinions.

The fact that, after twenty years or so of high-school teaching, a gentleman who has presented no public evidence of specialized and scientific competency beyond administrative ability and the mastery of a ready journalistic pen, experiences a distaste for Milton and Burke and opines that Latin and algebra are not significant studies, is in itself of no more significance than the fact that an elderly teacher of Greek is of the contrary opinion. What makes it a timely topic of discussion is the consideration that the reformer is widely believed to speak as an expert or for experts in a supposed science of education.

‘Abraham Flexner is another new name that appeals to us,’ writes the San Fran-

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cisco *Chronicle* of August 19, 1916. 'He . . . says "mental discipline is not a genuine or valid purpose—it's a make-believe."' Our plain speech is a part of the price that Mr. Flexner must pay for this continental fame.

There can be no question of personality so long as the appeal is solely to the unmisrepresented printed word. And no skepticism that we may express about the validity of his science can offend his sense of propriety more than the language of his disciples about the Classics of England, Greece, and Rome shocks those to whom the Classics are a personal religion.

One of the tests for vocational fitness approved by the experts to whose scientific evaluations we are asked to submit the destiny of humanistic studies is to cross out a given word or letter in an assigned text. Testing myself by this method on the text of Mr. Flexner's article, I drew my pencil through eighty-one occurrences of 'discipline' and 'dis-

ciplinary.' Doubtless, if my perceptions had not been blunted by thirty years' teaching of Greek and Latin, I might have observed more. But even from these inadequate statistics my unscientific mind inferred an obsession. And, in truth, through twenty columns of the *Atlantic* Mr. Flexner tilts at windmills of his own hallucination and belabors men of straw. Whatever some foolish advocates of the Classics may have sometimes said, the systematic exaggeration of the value of merely disciplinary or gymnastic study is no essential element in our unwillingness to have American education regulated out of hand by experts who hate *Lycidas* and think *Comus* a bore.

The systematic antithesis between a supposed disciplinary theory of education and a content system is fallacious in logic and has no basis in fact. There is no such sharply antithetic absolute '*entweder-oder*' as the argument postulates. The alleged incompatibility between the cul-

ture argument and the disciplinary theory rests upon the unwarranted assumption that each is to be taken exclusively. But it is apparent to common sense that the reasons for the place in the curriculum assigned to any given study may be and usually are cumulative—the sum of our estimates of its disciplinary, cultural, utilitarian, vocational, æsthetic, social, or other values. The matter cannot be disposed of by this high *a priori* road. It is not true that the schools of to-day are dominated by the ideal of formal discipline. It is not true, unless the modernists belong to the class from which Emerson prayed to be delivered—of those who think themselves persecuted when they are contradicted. It is not true, unless Mr. Flexner, like a recent anonymous satirist of faculty meetings, regards any survival of an idea that he desires to extirpate as equivalent to its superstitious worship.

As an expert in secondary education, Mr. Flexner must be aware that the actual

curricula of the schools and the statistics of election are grossly at variance with his exaggerations. It is perhaps an uneasy suspicion of this that constrains him to buttress his main thesis with two subsidiary arguments. The infection of the hateful disciplines, Latin and algebra, communicates itself to all other studies and causes them to be taught in a dull, mechanical, lifeless, formal fashion. The sole support of this generalization is that comprehensive indictment of human fallibility and inefficiency which has always gained the reformer his hearing. Independently of all preconceived purposes and systems, languid, mechanical, and in that sense 'formal' teaching is easier for the teacher than the exhausting outpour of inspiration, life, and originality. Half-vitalized teaching will remain with us until the modernist Utopia provides and pays for a quarter of a million of the 'original or heroic school-teachers' missed by Mr. H. G. Wells—teachers exempt

from frailty and love of ease, and intensely vital, alert, and intelligent throughout the long and weary day. Every new and 'practical' or 'inspirational' reform has lapsed into mechanism, formalism, and verbalism in the goose-step-drilled masses of its teachers. Even the agricultural colleges out West, I am told, find it easier and pleasanter to lecture on agricultural pedagogy than to teach real farming in the sweat of the brow.

The other indirect argument is that the influence of the preparatory school technically so-called, and the presence of college requirements, impose the disciplinary ideal upon all secondary schools. There is nothing to confirm this assertion except its *Zwecknotwendigkeit* for the purposes of Mr. Flexner's argument. It suggests, however, a problem which Mr. Flexner does not here discuss and at which I can only glance. It is not true that in large American high schools the organization of college preparatory classes is

prohibitive in cost, or presents difficulties of administration that a little good-will could not easily overcome. But the good-will is often lacking, and principals who hate the Classics or are irrationally jealous of the colleges avail themselves of these pretexts to suppress Greek altogether, while waiting for the day of reckoning with Latin. Some time it will be needful to argue this question to a conclusion, and to appeal to thoughtful secondary teachers to repudiate the demagogues who do not blush to tell them that the very term college requirements is an offense, because 'it is the student who has requirements, not the college.'

Equally brief must be my examination of Mr. Flexner's main contention that psychological and educational science does not recognize any such thing as mental discipline. The general tendency to the spread of power and facility to connected functions and processes, and the technical testimony of science in respect of this

irradiation of acquired faculty in the more elementary processes of the mind, are still under debate, with a strong presumption that there exists such a tendency. To the practical purpose of estimating the disciplinary value of high-school and collegiate studies, this kind of science has nothing to contribute. The essential consideration is obviously the number of elements which the compared processes have in common—the elements, that is to say, which the entire educational process involved in the linguistic analyses of Latin grammar, the mastery of Latin vocabulary, the critical translation and appreciation of Latin writers has in common with other desirable kinds of knowledge or forms of mental activity and faculty.

In other words, science leaves this question where it was—to the adjudication of common sense, observation, and relevant argument on the specific facts by those who know the facts well

enough to discuss them intelligently. This is familiar ground. It is perfectly well known to competent psychologists. And the abuse of the appeal to 'science' in this connection has been discreditable to the professors of pedagogy and an imposition on the public as well.

I have said this before, and heard in reply that, as an amateur, I had misunderstood the statements of the pedagogical psychologists. They were aware that science had not pronounced a definitive verdict. But the question is, not what individual controversialists may know, but what the majority of them seek to make the public believe. Pedagogical psychology cannot escape this collective responsibility by hedging in this manner. Mr. Flexner himself may never have so hedged or evaded. I dare say he has always charged headlong whenever he fancied that he saw the red rag of mental discipline. But if he is acquainted with the literature of the question, he ought

not to tell the public that science recognizes no such thing.

The dead set against 'mental discipline' is polemics, not science. It is forgotten as soon as it has served to discredit Latin and algebra. There are authentic anecdotes of the allegation of mental discipline in justification of high-school courses in typewriting. Professor O'Shea argues, that 'hewing to the line in manual training will make the student realize the necessity of hewing to the moral line in all his conduct,' and that 'the experience thus gained with natural things insensibly affects all one's relationships.'

Similarly, Mr. Flexner's digression and diatribe on the so-called faculty psychology is merely a red herring across the trail. For the purposes of secondary and collegiate education it does not matter two straws whether the so-called faculties of the mind do or do not 'exist in separate form.' The reduction of all questions to their ultimate metaphysical terms is a

favorite fallacy of the sciolist. The protest against the 'faculty psychology' has become one of the most intolerable of twentieth-century commonplaces. Everybody suspects everybody else of overlooking the ultimate unity and interdependence of the so-called parts or functions of the mind. From Matthew Arnold's sonnet on Butler's sermons back to Plato's *Republic*, a long series of poets and metaphysicians illustrates this antinomy. We are no nearer a final metaphysical solution than in Plato's day. And common sense will continue to discuss education in terms of mental faculties as the eminent psychologist Lloyd-Morgan does, without commitment to any absolute metaphysical hypothesis about the one and the many in mind and their relation to matter.

IV

It is comparatively easy to parry these or any other particular thrusts of the experts in the new pedagogical science. But how shall we meet the vague predisposition in the twentieth-century mind to admit that there is, there must be, there is soon destined to be, a true science of education taking its principles from a scientific and definitive psychology. For it is to this popular faith that the chief and final fallacy of the militant modernists, the insinuation of pseudo-science under cover of real science, makes its appeal.

This indeterminate claim can be met only by an equally broad challenge to produce the evidence, to exhibit some tangible results fairly proportionate to the expenditure of money, time, labor, and investigation on these subjects in the past fifty years. Pseudo-science is not an invidious question-begging epithet. It is merely a convenient watch-

word for that policy of carrying the war into Africa to which the humanist is driven, and in which he is justified by the present conduct of the debate.

The conflict of science and Classics is a dead issue. Science has won an overwhelming victory. And its real competitor in education to-day is, not classical humanism, but pseudo-science. There is ample time for both science and Latin in a rationally constructed curriculum. There is not time for both and for the *dementia præcox* of premature preoccupation with pseudo-science.

But real science is hard work—almost as hard as Latin; while the science of the talking delegates of science is a soft snap. And the representatives of real science will some time awaken to this fact and cease to waste their energies in blockading the last starveling remnants of the Greeks, and hindering high-school students from getting enough linguistic analysis to teach them to think and talk straight, and

enough Latin vocabulary to render first aid to their spelling and qualify them to consult an English dictionary with some glimmer of intelligence.

The seemingly invidious term 'pseudo-science,' then, is intended only as a fair characterization of the monstrous disproportion between the pretensions of pedagogical psychology, or the science of education, and its verifiable achievements. It would be ungenerous and illiberal to press this point, if the adepts of this science frankly admitted that they are pioneers on the frontiers of physiology and psychology, tentatively working in graduate laboratories and seminars toward a possible science of the future. But they fall back to that bombproof only when hard pressed in the open. They make very different claims when they appear before legislatures, parents' meetings, and teachers' associations, or in the compilation of the textbooks which they compel all teachers to study.

An Ohio colleague, Professor Lord, writes that 'any graduate of an Ohio college who wishes to teach Latin can present as a professional qualification for such a position courses in the Hegelian logic, abnormal psychology, and the birth-rate of immigrants. He cannot present as part of his professional equipment courses in Latin literature or Roman history.'

The exploiters of such tests as these will themselves be tried by tests which they cannot endure—not of course in this inadequate paper, but in the debates of the coming decade. As experts they would perhaps deny the competency of the amateur critic. But our contention is precisely that, in range of classroom experience, observation, reflection, and pertinent reading, they are no more experts than we are. As the Autocrat says, the layman has sometimes actually heard more sermons than the professional preacher and theologian. I can see no evidence that they have ever studied or

understood, either the literature that we wish to teach, or the literature that we ourselves produce for purposes of 'promotion,' in either sense of the word. But I for one have read, not a dozen, or a score, but many more of their authorities and their productions. I read many of these treatises with a pencil and a purpose to note anything worth noting. I found less that was new, true, significant, and relevant to the purpose than in any other literature of like extent that I ever sampled. A clever man and ready writer can doubtless compile readable jumble-books full of unrelated facts and anecdotes, drawn from heterogeneous fields of knowledge, placed in incongruous juxtaposition, and unified only by the schematism of artificial and arbitrary system. But the definite contributions of this literature to the understanding of the present human mind and to the rational conduct of education are in ludicrous disproportion to its extent and its pretensions. My

present object is not to prove this, but to induce a few readers to test it for themselves. It is not so hard as it looks. It is a little harder for most people than for a teacher of Greek, because he does not have to look up the etymologies of the mostly superfluous technical terms which are the chief stock in trade.

This literature is like Hesiod's hill of virtue—it may be a little rough and steep at the beginning, but grows easier as we mount; or, rather, *facilis descensus* is the apter classical allusion here. The first book you read may seem hard or may impose upon you by its variety of irrelevant information. But read on, and you will find that they all say about the same kind of thing and that they all say amazingly little—practically nothing to edify a reader who is able in any reasonable measure to draw upon the world's inherited stores of experience and common sense. There is plenty of truism, paradox, tabulation of statistics,

questionnaires, that lead to nothing, and descriptions of the technic of experiments that prove nothing to the purpose. But the challenge to produce definite results evokes only assertion and prophecy.

The programme that postulates the application of rigid scientific methods to the mind and history of man was not first formulated by Spencer, Comte, Vico, Spinoza, or Descartes. But recent progress in physical science has immensely strengthened the plausibility of prophecy that the extension and refinement of its methods must soon subdue and annex the adjacent domains of 'superorganic' evolution.

No one would desire to dash these generous aspirations. But living in the future is, as Mr. Chesterton says, a soft job. And one of the most imperative tasks of present-day criticism is to keep the highways of common sense and rational thought clear of the rubbish shot down upon them from pseudo-scientific

towers of Babel. The naïveté which admits without verification the authentic mission of any writer who comes prophesying in the name of science, is natural and pardonable in eminent professors of physical science, intoxicated by the progress which, as they sometimes put it, has recently transpired in their own domain. But in the more sophisticated representatives of the inchoate sciences, the resort to prophecy is a part of the recognized tactics of debate. It is with this that they meet the challenge to exhibit *their* results, which grows more and more embarrassing as the decades lengthen out since the foundation of their laboratories and the establishment of their predominance in education.

Anybody can verify this provisionally by reading the papers in the fifth volume of the St. Louis Congress of Arts and Sciences, and then going on to the study of Professor Titchener's *Experimental Psychology of the Thought Processes*, and a

select half-dozen of recent textbooks on educational psychology. I am not speaking of possible contributions to physiology, brain-anatomy, pathology, school-administration, the elaboration of laboratory technic, and the like. These I neither affirm nor deny. I am speaking of results fairly describable as new and significant, and applicable to the understanding of the normal human mind and the rational guidance of high-school and college education. What for these purposes have all the Ebbinghauses to tell us of memory, association, judgment, and the relation of language to thought, that was not known to Mill, Taine, Schopenhauer, and Emerson, or for that matter to Quintilian, Cicero, and Plato? The attentive reader will find that at the critical moment they evade this test with denunciations of the insufficiency of Mill's association psychology, appeals to the blessed equivocation 'apperception,' and prophecies of greater things to come.

Space fails for exhaustive citation, and it is difficult to single out individual names, not because fair quotation is offensive personality, but because there is no agreement about the scientific standing of many of these writers. When I say that Professor Münsterberg's page about the contribution of experimental psychology to the philology of the epic, or his account of the experiments on the æsthetic appreciation of the vowel-music of Keats and Byron, is pure, definite, and highly finished nonsense, I am sometimes told that Professor Münsterberg was not authorized to speak for psychological science. And there are doubtless iconoclasts who would oppose the same demurrer to a citation of typical utterances of President Stanley Hall or Mr. Flexner himself.

Let us turn then to the widely commended and compulsorily studied huge volume of Professor Thorndike on educational psychology. He begins by laying

down in such a solemn way a long list of propositions such as these: 'When any conductive unit is in readiness to conduct, for it to do so is satisfying; when any conductive unit is not in readiness to conduct, for it to conduct is annoying.'— 'A man's intellect and will is the sum of his tendencies to respond to situations and elements of situations.'

The secondarily automatic reiteration of this sort of thing appeals to the eternal instinct for scholasticism in the human mind. In the words of James Russell Lowell, it 'cheaply gratifies that universal desire of the human mind to have everything accounted for.' It was this remark of Lowell's, perhaps, that led an adept of the new science of criticism to animadvert more in sorrow than in anger on Lowell's unaccountable weakness for 'stopping short of the ultimate.' When Professor Thorndike has posited his absolute and ultimate principles of education and descends to particulars, what has

he to tell us? Well, he tells us among other things that educational theorists 'violate these principles when they explain learning in terms of general faculties such as attention, interest, memory, or judgment, instead of, ' and so forth.

It would require a chapter to expose the fallacies of that sentence. We have already seen that the eternal metaphysical antinomy of the one and the many, as transferred from ontology to psychology, is totally irrelevant to any profitable or practicable present-day discussion of the process of learning. One of the best modern psychologies for teachers, the little volume of the eminent English psychologist Lloyd-Morgan, dismisses in a brief paragraph the central nervous system, 'the multitude of connections' and all their afferents and efferents, and goes on to speak of the faculties of attention, memory, and so forth, as unaffectedly as you or I would do. Like Lowell, he has

enough common sense to stop short of purely hypothetical ultimates.

Particularizing still further, Professor Thorndike continues: 'School practice neglects them [these principles] . . . when it gives elaborate drills in *bonus-a-um* and in conjugating *amo*.' As soon as he says anything specific, he betrays himself. The statement is neither scientific nor true. There is no psychological principle that determines unconditionally the proportion of systematic formal memorizing of paradigms that is most helpful in the acquisition of an inflected language. It probably varies with the idiosyncrasy of different minds. Mere memorizing *en bloc* will not avail unless reinforced by exercises in the recognition and the use of the separate forms in phrases and sentences. And there is no salvation in educational psychology for a teacher too stupid to perceive or too lazy to practice this. But the majority of those who have really learned Latin have always

memorized the forms. The majority of experienced teachers, from Quintilian down, have always believed that this is in the main the best way. Professor Thorndike's confident assertion, then, is not science: it is like Mr. Flexner's heavy satire on the procedure of the Latin classroom, and his assumption that nothing said or done there is made intelligible to the student—a mere ebullition of partisan rancor against the study of Latin.

But I cannot summarize the entire literature of this new scholasticism. It contains much else, of course: some sensible unsystematic observations of experienced teachers; some contributions, it may be, to physiological psychology; incongruous odds and ends of what I know to be *misinformation* drawn from the history of philosophy, and of what in my ignorance I will charitably assume to be information taken from textbooks of biology and anatomy; tabulations of answers to questionnaires; the curves of progress in

learning to telegraph or typewrite; the statistics of epilepsy, measurements of the force of the knee-jerk, and exercises in self-control—of the muscles that move the ears.

An adult who has reference standards of real knowledge in his specialty, and is ballasted by the accumulated common sense of years of reading and experience, may dabble in this literature with no greater injury than loss of his time. Its disintegrating and deliquating effect on the logical functions of young minds compelled to attack it without the protection of a gasmask is a thing imagination boggles at. It will surely strain 'apperception' to the limit to assimilate the statements within a few pages, that 'Socrates discovered concepts,' that 'the formula of cholestrin is $C_{26}H_{44}OH_2O_4$,' and that 'Key declares that intense mental activity among the upper classes of Sweden has resulted in a marked increase in the tendency to nose-bleed.'

V

The latest response to these challenges is a disclaimer of all pretensions to finality. What the pedagogical psychologists profess for themselves and commend to us is the scientific and experimental attitude toward education as toward all large social and human interests. They are merely collecting statistics and trying experiments, to prove which of two competing methods of teaching is preferable. This position is in the abstract unassailable. But the inferences which the public is expected to draw from its application in practice are matters of grave concern.

'There is danger,' says the Platonic Socrates, 'that you may be trying an experiment, not on the *vile corpus* of a Carian slave, but on your own sons or the sons of your friends, and, as the proverb says, breaking the large vessel in learning to make pots.'

America is very large. It is that

mart or world's fair of institutions and types which Plato says a great democracy must be. We could cordially welcome the human experience which Mr. Flexner proposes to contribute to the exhibits, were it not for the misapprehensions to which his designation of it as an experiment will give rise. This is not a verbal cavil. The modernist school will not be an experiment but an experience, standing in the same relation to all possible future sciences of character and education as that occupied by what Mill calls 'the general remarks afforded by common experience respecting human nature in our own age and by history respecting times gone by.' It will be one more increment of fact or group of facts. To call it an experiment in any scientific sense of the word is to mislead public opinion and prejudge the entire question.

This popular exploitation of the false analogy between experiments in the laboratory and experiments on man and

society is not a new thing. There is a clarifying literature of the subject which the modernists characteristically disregard. One source of this literature is the discussion by Brunetière, Faguet, Doumic, and other thoughtful French critics, of Zola's naïve notion of the experimental novel. The more technical examination of the idea derives from John Stuart Mill's chapters on the logic of the moral sciences. In the physical sciences the experimental method isolates and discovers the true cause by systematic elimination. The plurality of causes and the intermixture of effects preclude this procedure in the infinitely complex social sciences of ethnology and education. 'The instances requisite for the prosecution of a directly experimental inquiry into the formation of character would be a number of human beings to bring up and educate from infancy to mature age. . . . It is not only impossible to do this completely, but even to do so much of it as should constitute a

tolerable approximation. An apparently trivial circumstance which eluded our vigilance might let in a train of impressions and associations sufficient to vitiate the experiment. . . . No one who has sufficiently reflected on education is ignorant of this truth.'

Mr. Flexner's disciples owed it to themselves and to the public to point out what they deemed the errors and limitations of Mill's doctrines here. Instead, they are content to applaud in general terms the advent of the experimental ideal in education.

Professor Dewey welcomes the 'endeavor to incarnate an experimental attitude in the conduct of a school, because it will substitute specific inquiries for temperamental conviction and small facts for opinions.' Here, as in the introductory essay of *Creative Intelligence*, his deprecation of vagueness is couched in language singularly abstract and vague. There is no reference to any specific argu-

ment or fact, experiment, or formulation of the experimental method on which issue might be joined. The *New Republic* itself is equally confident that 'no one who knows the temper of men like Mr. Flexner will for an instant question the utter disinterestedness, the exact and catholic spirit with which they will make the experiment.'

Mr. Flexner, in advance of his experiment, holds conviction about the psychology of mental discipline and the teachers who 'treat with convincing gravity . . . things called voices, moods, and gerunds,' which are nothing if not temperamental. And the intellectual disinterestedness of an experimenter who proposes to test Latin by suppressing it altogether, inspires as little confidence as his logic. The fallacy of one cause dominates his thinking. He conceives experiment as the direct transfer of the method of Pasteur to society and education. Latin is a microbe by whose pres-

ence or absence in a crucial instance the cause of disease or health may be ascertained.

Life and education are infinitely complex. Those of us who most deplore Mr. Flexner's theories may also cordially welcome the new school as a concrete entity. Any school that secures wholesome physical and moral conditions for the early years of a select group of children may accomplish for *them* a good that outweighs the probable consequences of the intellectual errors of its founders. We wish the new school all success, and we believe in the entire sincerity of Mr. Flexner's enthusiasm for the betterment of American education. But it would be the height of naïveté to join in the congratulations on the presumable scientific disinterestedness with which he will conduct the experiment. To do that is to overlook elementary human motive and the very nature of the problem. A school founded in large part to verify the assumption that

Latin is neither a necessary nor a significant ingredient in a well-mixed course of study is not likely to disappoint expectation. And in the plurality of causes there is no scientific method by which the advocates of Latin will be able to disprove this foregone conclusion. This we foresee because, in spite of their perfunctory protests and caveats, the writings of the modernists plainly manifest an unreasoning and violent antipathy, not merely to the study of Latin, but to the Classics and all that the Classics represent.

VI

I have left myself only a few words to sum up and define the main issue raised by the so-called modernist reform of education. It is not the place of physical science in our civilization and in our universities: that is secure. It is not the opportunity of industrial or vocational training for the masses: we all welcome that. It is not the conversion of the American high school into the old Latin-verse-writing English public school: nobody ever proposed that. It is not the prescription of a universal requirement of Greek or the maintenance of a disproportionate predominance of Latin in our high schools and colleges: there is not the slightest danger of that. It is the survival or the total suppression, in the comparatively small class of educated leaders who graduate from high schools and colleges, of the very conception of linguistic, literary, and critical

discipline; of culture, taste, and standards; of the historic sense itself; of some trained faculty of appreciation and enjoyment of our rich heritage from the civilized past; of some counterbalancing familiarity with the actual evolution of the human man, to soften the rigidities of physical science, and to check and control by the touchstones of humor and common sense the *a priori* deductions of pseudo-science from conjectural reconstructions of the evolution of the physical and animal man.

It is in vain that they rejoin that they too care for these things, and merely repudiate our exclusive definitions of them. That is, in the main, only oratorical precaution and the tactics of debate, as, if space permitted, I could show by hundreds of citations from their books. The things which, for lack of better names, we try to suggest by culture, discipline, taste, standards, criticism, and the historic sense, they hate. Or, if you prefer, they are completely insensitive to them

and wish to impose their own insensibility upon the coming generation. They are genuinely skeptical of intellectual discriminations which they do not perceive, and æsthetic values which they do not feel. They are fiercely resentful of what they deem the supercilious arrogance of those who possess or strive for some far-off touch or faint tincture of the culture and discipline which they denounce as shibboleths, taboos, and the arbitrary conventions of pedants.

From their own point of view it is natural that they should deprecate with sullen jealousy the inoculation of the adolescent mind with standards and tastes that would render it immune to what one of them has commended in print as the 'science' of Mrs. Elsie Clews Parsons. The purpose, or, at any rate, the tendency of their policies is to stamp out and eradicate these things and inculcate exclusively their own tastes and ideals by controlling American education

with the political efficiency of Prussian autocracy and in the fanatical intolerance of the French anticlericalists. Greek and Latin have become mere symbols and pretexts. They are as contemptuous of Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Racine, Burke, John Stuart Mill, Tennyson, Alexander Hamilton, or Lowell, as of Homer, Sophocles, Virgil, or Horace. They will wipe the slate of everything that antedates Darwin's *Descent of Man*, Mr. Wells's *Research Magnificent* and the familiar pathos of James Whitcomb Riley's vernacular verse.

These are the policies that mask as compassion for the child bored by literature which, they say, it cannot be expected to appreciate and understand, or behind the postulate that we should develop æsthetic and literary sensibilities only by means of the literature that expresses the spirit of modern science, not that which preserves in amber the husks of the dead past.

'Purpose' is, after 'situation,' the fav-

The Assault on Humanism

orite catchword of this propaganda. Truly—they will ‘answer to the purpose easy things to understand.’ Easy things to understand,—the things of immediate appeal to the relaxed self and the natural taste for bathos,—these only would they stamp upon the plastic memory of childhood. They do not wish the child’s mind, even in the strenuous morning hours of school, to be tuned to the pitch, to be keyed up to the appreciation of the things that are more excellent—the things that even in imperfect apprehension may abide in the memory as possessions, touchstones, standards, ideals for life.

Much lost I; something stayed behind.
A snatch maybe of classic song,
Some breathing of a deathless mind,
Some love of truth, some hate of wrong.

‘The literature that embodies the scientific and progressive thought of the present age.’ On this only would they form the collegian’s taste and judgment, and his sense of historical, social, and human values. They do not wish the

undergraduate's automatic response to the stimulus and the all-absorbing fashion of the contemporary environment to be confused by comparisons with fashions of thought that have passed away. They instinctively distrust that spirit of critical humanism which, from Plato to Pater and Arnold and Lowell and Anatole France, has always refused to take quite seriously the systems and the system-builders of the hour. These half-conscious motives are clothed with the glow of conscious sincerity by their genuine incapacity to conceive that writers who never heard of submarines and Zeppelins can contribute anything to the spiritual and intellectual life of a civilization that culminates in the War of 1914.

Homer was a primitive tribal bard. Æschylus represents the obsolete sociology of the city state. The cosmic philosophy of Herbert Spencer has only contempt for the petty personal theme of the imperialistic and militaristic Virgil — 'Arms and the man.' What message

can he, the singer of imperial Rome, have for the modern spirit:—

Now his Forum roars no longer, fallen every purple
Cæsar's dome.

The theology of Dante and Milton lacks the breadth of the Lincoln social settlement and the congress of religions—and their cosmogony is incompatible with the planetesimal theory.

Shakespeare is feudal; Pope, Queen-Anneish; Burke, eighteenth-century; Tennyson and Mill, Victorian. Neither irony, nor rhetoric, nor argument will make any dent in the carapace of minds case-hardened in the formulas of an *a priori* evolutionary philosophy of progress against all direct, immediate, and peremptory perception of absolute beauties and finer shades of truth. The certainties of their fixed and fanatical assurance are unclouded by any such self-questioning as that which gives pause to the great liberal, radical, and modernist poet Carducci, in his wonderful sonnet to Dante,

which I give here in Richard Garnett's translation:

Dante, how is it that *my* vows I bear,
Submitted at thy shrine to bend and pray,
To Night alone relinquishing thy lay,
And with returning sun returning there?
Never for me hath Lucy breathed a prayer,
Matilde with lustral fount washed sin away,
Or Beatrice on celestial way
Led up her mortal love by starry stair.
Thy Holy Empire I abhor, the head
Of thy great Frederick, in Olona's vale
Most joyfully had cloven, crown and brains.
Empire and Church in crumbling ruin fail:
Above, thy ringing song from heaven is sped:
The Gods depart, the poet's hymn remains.

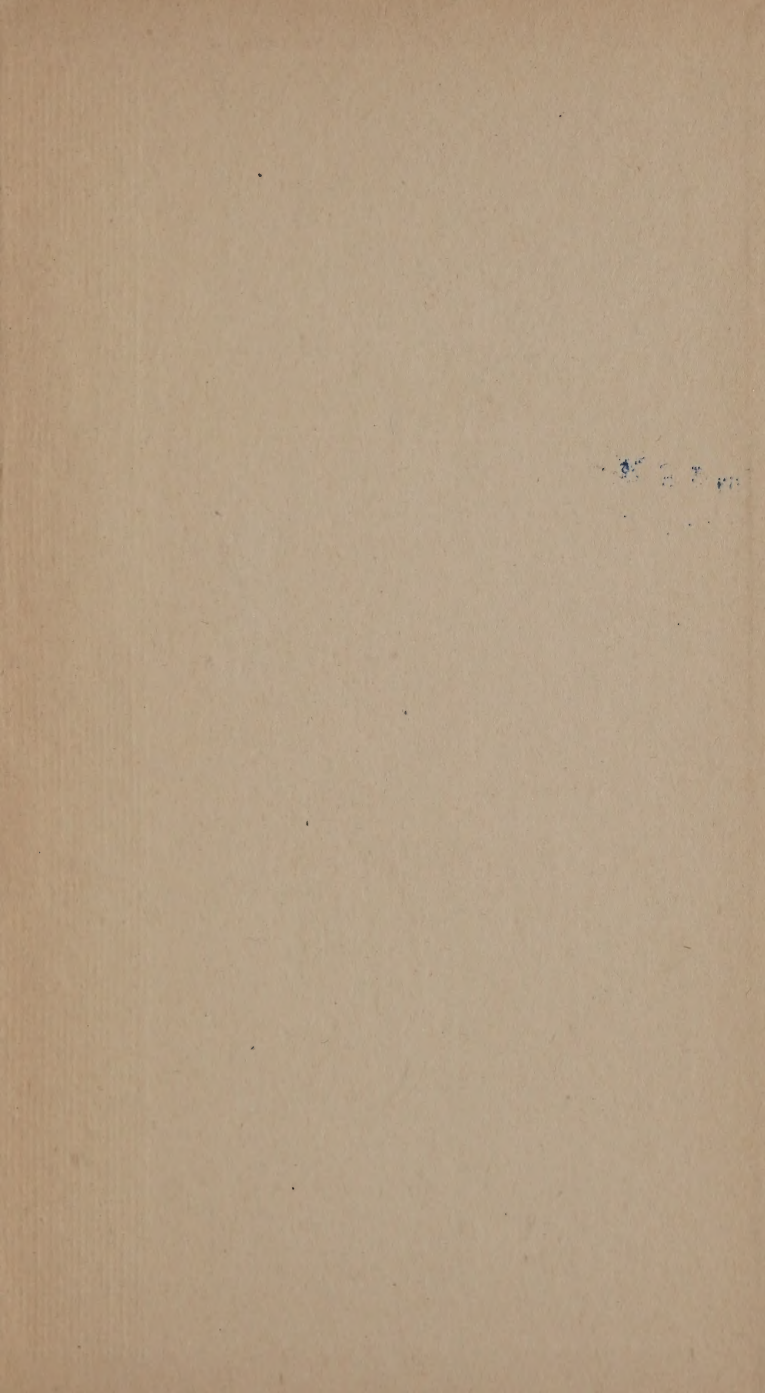
'Our little systems have their day,' said another obsolete nineteenth-century poet and thinker. Our little systems have their day; but the human spirit that creates and dissolves all systems, abides. And the study of the human spirit is not planetary or biological evolution, or the anthropology of the pre-human man. It is neither the psychology of the laboratory nor the metaphysics of the schools: it is neither science nor pseudo-science—it is humanism.

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